Note 7.2 – Using student surveys for measuring teacher effectiveness

We know that student surveys are predictive of student achievement (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012) and can capture a range of teaching strategies and skills from basic to complex (van der Lans et al., 2015). The predictive power of student surveys as a measure of teacher performance tends to be lower than for observations and test-based scores (Grissom & Youngs, 2016); however, the evidence suggests that they can inform teacher evaluation judgements as one source of evidence in a wider teacher evaluation process (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2017; Coe et al., 2014). In terms of reliability, student surveys have the advantage that they 'aggregate the impressions of many individuals who've spent many hours with a teacher' (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012, p. 1; Polikoff, 2015). There is, however, some evidence of possible biases within student ratings relating to (same) gender and ethnicity (Egalite & Kisida, 2017) (although these were generally quite small); issues around social desirability bias; and questions about students having sufficient insight, information and frames of reference to offer valid judgements (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015, p. 239). None of this suggests that student surveys can produce moderate to high validity evidence on teacher effectiveness for high-stakes purposes. For formative purposes, however, student surveys may have potential and may have been underestimated by many researchers and educators – perhaps as a result of a series of myths and misconceptions associated with their use (Benton & Cashin, 2012).

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